

DEBATE

BETWEEN

A BELIEVER IN

THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY,

AND

A NON-BELIEVER IN THE SAME:

UPON VARIOUS QUESTIONS

APPERTAINING TO THEIR PECULIAR VIEWS.

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DEBATE, &c.

Deist.—To *Nature*, (my Christian friend,) and to *her* alone, do I look up for light, and knowledge, and satisfaction, upon the ever-interesting *subjects* of our creation, the ultimate objects and designs of our existence, and the character of the great Being who is the author of all.

Christian.—I know it—but your goddess is blind—and if “the blind lead the blind, will not both fall into the ditch?” My dear friend, let me lead you to the very Fountain of knowledge; and though frequently “clouds and darkness surround Him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitations of his throne.” Let me conduct you to the Bible, which is his word; and I cannot but believe that your candour and sincere desire to embrace the truth, will find you wooing a new but a far more lovely object—her name is *Faith*—she dispels the chaotic darkness of Nature, presents us with Heaven’s marvellous light, changes the moral direction of the downward wanderer, effaces the stains of sin and corruption, and with the fulness of Joy, wafts us upon the sea of Hope, with the gales of Love, and the sails of Redemption, directly unto the right hand of our divine Saviour. Such is *Faith*, my friend. You see that she has great power. Through her mediation, the blackness of infernal darkness is transformed into the refulgent glory of the celestial paradise; through her agency, a sinner becomes a saint.—Faith! she is an anchor to the soul “sure and steadfast.” Faith! her golden compass always and unerringly points to the high towers of the court of Christ. To be in her company, therefore, is to be in the company of an angel

of the highest order. There is, there can be, no deception in her smiles. It is she that assures us that there will be an endless state of existence after death. O! amazing thought! a belief in an after state and in a just dispensation of rewards and punishments! It is well worthy of the gratulations of angels—it is well worthy of the benedictions of the saints of the Most High! this, and this alone, in the relation of man to his Creator, gives full and entire perfection to his character and royal government.

Certain it is, that the dim light of nature shows us nothing but conjectures concerning an after scene. It is equally sure, that the gospel of truth does recognise and clearly point out this great fundamental cardinal article of our belief. This one point settled, and all things else inculcated in our divine religion, become the clear concomitants of its holy power. The manifest absurdity of the doctrine of annihilation, always ought to make an unbeliever blush at the deformity and wickedness of suggestions fit only to be supported by the partisans of vice and infidelity. It either supposes that God has not the power, or else is lacking in the disposition to reward the good deeds of this life suitably, and punish those that are evil. I am free to say, that the belief of this one principle is to me an enduring glorious consolation. Without this, I am nothing—the world is nothing—all its pageantry, wealth, pleasures, and renown, are nothing—for “like the baseless fabrick of a vision, they leave not a wreck behind.” But, with this, every thing is right—we assert a dignity that elevates us to the true pinnacle of greatness—we disengage ourselves of clay, and tread upon the starry firmament on high. With this, we bind ourselves to the ligaments of the Deity. With this, we bear sorrow and pain, (which more or less are inseparable from this world) with fortitude and cheerfulness. The mind is a kingdom—“it can make a heaven of earth.” In anticipation, the perfection and blessedness of the kingdom of Heaven take possession of the saint even here, and impart joys and consolations “that are neither few nor small.” *The hope of living and be-*

ing happy beyond the grave, is something very light and insignificant compared to *a belief* of it. Deists may, by possibility, sometimes lay claim to the *former*; but, resting alone upon their system of natural religion, they can never drink of the pure and inexhaustible streams of the *latter*. There is a moral grandeur and positive utility, which belong to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, that, so far as man is concerned, cannot belong to any thing else under the sun. We continually sigh and long for happiness—we ask the stars and the heavenly hosts to go to their dwelling places—we do not call this our home—we grasp at immortality! Our wishes, and thoughts, and desires, our conceptions of the Deity and of his perfections, his boundless love and infinite power, all proclaim, trumpet-tongued, that we do live after death.—But these are not absolutely conclusive. The wishing for an object, and the having of it, are not one and the same thing. The language of poetry, though it may be sublime, is not always the language of truth. Fantasies and dreams are far from being like mathematical truths, or the truths of positive divine revelation. O, do seek that dear heavenly angel, *Faith*, and she will, ere long, lead you to the gates of glory.

Deist.—You talk of poetry, and the dreams of the imagination, sir, as if they belonged exclusively to me, and had no influence over your opinions and views.—Permit me to assure you, that your whole scheme of religion rests upon nothing but the phantoms of the imagination—an enthusiasm which takes possession of your brain, called Faith, proclaims all in the world, who honestly differ with you in opinion, as heretics and infidels. When will the world learn to distinguish facts and naked truths, from theories built up and supported by priests and speculators, that start not from ocular clear demonstrations and undeniable propositions; but from hearsay testimonies, or mere suppositions. There is too much sophistry in the world—and however plausibly one may dub religion over it as a title or a cover; still, if the whole matter is sifted to the bottom, it will be found that a sys-

tem started upon false premises, must fall to the ground. But to return to your favourite, Faith; let me ask you, does not your Bible teach you that it is the gift of God? and furthermore, do not the pulpits of all denominations of Christians, insist upon it, that, without *Faith* and *Repentance*, one can never enter into the kingdom of Heaven? or, in other words, that he must go to hell, a place of dire, lengthy, eternal torments? If it be true that Faith is the work of God, man, then, must wait for its operation and pouring upon him from God, before he can be either praised or blamed, rewarded or punished. If God never gives it to him, he must go to hell without remedy. So it depends not upon man, mainly, but upon God, whether he is to be happy or miserable. For be it known that, according to your system, no portion of that good thing, *Repentance*, alone, can take him out of the mire. No matter how deep and godly his sorrow may be, his *regret*, (or to use the technical term, *Repentance*) unless it be coupled with Faith in Christ, can be of no avail.— Now it does appear to me unreasonable and unjust, to either condemn or reward a human being, for an act, not of his own, but of the Deity's. I tell you, that I must look up to Nature, and to her alone, for a true standard or a correct mirror of the works and designs of the great Eternal First Cause. That man who tells me that Nature is blind, and that Reason is not a fit umpire to decide upon such apparent difficulties or mysteries as we meet with; but that we must fly to something else to clear up the matter, I must regard as either a fanatic or insane. The truth can never be struck out, that *we are all the children of Nature, and of Nature's God*; and that without *Reason*, we must cease to exist either as such children, or as beings for any valuable purposes whatsoever. If we consult not *Reason*, we can neither understand the Bible, expound its precepts, nor do any thing else that becomes us as the instruments of an all-wise Deity. And what then is *Reason*? She reclines upon the bosom of God, and proclaims that man is a subject of her sceptre. Her footsteps are traced far and wide over the boundless paths of Nature throughout all space and throughout *all time*—

(*eternity*, if you please.) And she declares that when man is not under her salutary control, he misses the legitimate objects of his aim—his mind is diseased, and of course that misery must take the reign in the absence of the ordinary and proper course of Nature. *Reason* and *Nature* are so much alike, that the violation of the one is invariably attended with a shock of the other. All the various elements of order and congruity in the Universe, rest upon the stable universal laws of Nature. These laws concern either matter or mind. But our remarks concern chiefly the relationship we bear to the laws of Mind—or to that moral code on which depend, so far as we are free agents, our weal or our wo, our happiness or our misery.

Christian.—You are right in assigning Reason a high place in the sphere of the Christian circle of duties and prerogatives; you are right in saying that without Reason we can neither understand nor expound the Bible. But O, my friend, what misplaced conceptions do you manifest in regard to Faith! Exercise your reason here, a little, and all will be plain to you. True, without Faith and Repentance, we cannot go to God; for without them there can be no forgiveness of sins, no purity of heart, no new birth, no washing of regeneration. True it is, also, that Faith is the gift of God; and why? because it proceeds from Prayer and Supplication—when we sinners, polluted moral free agents from the depths of the inmost heart, do truly pray unto God that he would blot out our sins and renew our minds in the knowledge and works of righteousness, then God is moved, out of his infinite compassion, to make us believe in Him and in his son Jesus Christ, to the great comfort and edification of our souls. When the mind is becalmed with the consciousness of having given up all to God, He graciously condescends to give us the living witness, Faith, that we have truly become his children, heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ. So it is rather an evidence that we are on the way to Heaven, than a condition precedent or a *sine qua non* in the matter. To God, therefore, and not

to man, is all the honour due for the infusion of Faith; nor does man act as a passive instrument, or as a mere machine, when, through the operation of Prayer, he finally merits that rich reward from the bounty of God. Be not deceived, my friend. There is a corruption in the natural heart of man that must be overcome and subdued, before we can go to a place of eternal happiness.—“The carnal heart is enmity against God.” We are born in a state of sin and misery, and nothing but the merits of Christ, through a prayerful heart, can make us the recipients of that Repentance and Faith which lead unto eternal life. Need I enter into a long detail of argument, to make you acknowledge the truth of that article of Christian Faith, the depravity of man? I think not—no one acquainted with his own heart, and with the history of the past and present state of mankind, can have a reasonable doubt on the subject. It will not do to trust to *Nature*—she is too wicked and corrupt, too much of a harlot, too imperfect, too profane, to provide for us pure draughts of that unalloyed pleasure to which we all aspire. The lessons which corrupt fallen *Nature* teaches, are contradictory, incoherent, cruel, revengeful—not unfrequently written in letters of blood. Murder and cruel tortures, and dire harrowings of soul, are not the unfrequent attendants of her wild anarchial reign. But if we go to the Bible, we shall find that our duties are plainly laid down. Our course is marked out for us, and if we follow it, all will and must be well—for neither the various trying vicissitudes of life, nor the dark shadows of death, can ever make us afraid, if we only have that Faith which leadeth unto eternal life through Christ.

Deist.—Let me fairly understand you. You say (and so does the Bible) that without Faith and Repentance, we cannot go to Heaven, do you not?

Christian.—Yes.

Deist.—We will then examine thoroughly the premises; and I will now promise, that if I can once see the

reasonableness and propriety of your doctrine, I shall not be ashamed to embrace it. You say that man, too, is a free agent in all this business. I greatly doubt it. I make a distinction between man's free agency in such acts of his as fall under the cognizance of temporal laws, and those same acts when viewed in final connexion in the grand chain of events under the government and final judgment of God, independent of temporal penalties or rewards. *Because*, though for present intents and purposes, we have a knowledge of good and evil, and are left free to act or not to act; though in this world we are left free to commit crimes or not, and are justly deserving of punishment; yet, considering that, as the Deity is in himself the perfection of righteousness and happiness, and that, in the end, nothing can impede or frustrate his designs, there would be an absurdity in the creature's (man's) doing that which would result as an infinite evil. The truth is, God knew from all eternity, what man would do. This you cannot get over—the Bible says so, and Reason says so. God knew, from all eternity, that man would sin. He then certainly allowed him to sin, or which is the same thing, did not hinder him from sinning. I know that various Christian sects maintain that there is a difference between Fore-ordination and Fore-knowledge; but I can see no practical difference between them. If God knew, from the earliest periods, that man would do thus and so; certain it is that the events to be brought about by him, are as sure of taking place as if he had issued his fiat or decree, that they should take place. We all justly assign an infinite degree and measure of knowledge, as necessarily belonging to God. Again—we all, with the greatest propriety, admit, that he is perfectly holy and happy in himself, and that neither men nor devils ever had or can have it in their power to lessen one jot of his felicity. Again—He fills all space, and is every where present; there is no limit to his ubiquity, and he superintends every event that ever did take place or that ever will take place, in such a manner that it shall redound to his own happiness and eternal glory. If, then, this be the case, man is an object

acted upon by him to further the designs of the Deity and to "fill out the measure of his glory." To say that the chain of events can be complete in Heaven, when a part of mankind are banished to outer darkness, where there is wailing and weeping and gnashing of teeth, cannot be possible. A perfectly benevolent Being cannot delight in the misery of his creatures—and if he has both the power and the will that they should be delivered from misery, surely they must be delivered. But, say you, the sinner's heart must be changed before he can see God—and when he hardens his heart and will not repent and believe the gospel, it is right that he should go to Hell; for go somewhere he must, or be somewhere he must, as his soul can never die, and as a wicked sinner can never pollute heaven with an unwelcome entrance there. It is not unreasonable, continue you, then, to suppose that when the final judgment day must come, he should be cast off and finally lost; for if God should deal better or easier with him than with others, it would make him partial and unjust. To this I can never accede. To my mind it is the same thing as to say, the Devil (or your devil, for I do not hold to devils,) has more power than the Almighty. Your doctrine is that the Devil wants to have all go to hell he possibly can, and that God wants to have all go to heaven. Now, therefore, if some do finally go to hell, the Devil gets his wish, and the Almighty does not. Of course, so far as the matter goes, the Devil gets completely the upper hand of the Almighty. And the matter does actually go a great ways; it goes no less than throughout the interminable ages of an eternity of wo! Can any thing be conceived more horrible and shocking, could it by possibility prove true? or if we consult Reason, can any thing be more absurd or contradictory? God wants a thing very much—is eager to gain it, and has ample power to possess it—but he takes a great delight in finally not getting it! O what a changeable, weak, imperfect Being, such a God would be! He may be the God of Christians, but I assure you he is not the God I believe in. As I observed to you a moment ago, there is, in substance, no difference

between God's fore-knowledge and his fore-ordination—say that the doctrine of Calvin is correct; that all things were fore-ordained which come to pass; that although God is to be sure a perfect Being, yet that, to answer wise purposes of his own, he allowed or decreed that man should violate certain laws, in order to draw good out of evil, and all will be consistent—this plan, provided that the doctrine of the Universalists is true, that all will be finally saved, will fully reconcile us to the existence of partial evil as finally proving the means of a general universal good. Not so the doctrine of an endless Hell. But I will proceed to the consideration of other material and important things in the discussion between us.

It is said that, as the morality of the Christian doctrines and rules is pure and reasonable in itself, and conducive to the well being of mankind, it cannot be good policy to refuse to sanction and support the gospel, even admitting that many things in it related as facts, are not such, but mere fables and romances. The assemblage of religious congregations is compared to the collection of the multitudes who attend the theatres, and such places of amusement in our cities, and the remark is often made, that, at the former, there is and can be no licentiousness; but, that among the latter, immorality and vice are carried on with system, and to an alarming extent. Admitting the truth of this, which I do not deny, viz. that immorality belongs to the latter and not to the former, I am far from maintaining that it is proper to encourage falsehood and deception, because good may spring out of it. The doctrine of the end justifying the means, does not at all chime with a sound healthful state of ethics. The maiden whiteness and divine lustre of truth, should never be tarnished with the foul unnatural blemishes of deception and fraud. Novels and romances will sometimes, when the moral of them is good, do for young people to read; but in the temples of the Most High, (even as in courts of temporal justice,) let us, when testimony and the law come in question, hear "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Christian.—You have wandered far from the merits of the controversy. I perfectly agree with you, that in religion there should be nothing like fraud or imposture, under pretences that good may result from it. But I maintain, that all the facts and statements concerning our religion, are real, and have actually occurred, as they are contained in the Books of the Old and New Testament. But you deny man's free agency, and thus saddle the whole blame of his sins upon the Almighty; and stoutly maintain, that it is unreasonable and cruel that there should be endless punishment after death. You intimate that you could swallow the humbug of Universalism, but utterly refuse a belief in the reasonableness and necessity of eternal punishment. Believing, as I do, that this eternal punishment will and must be the lot of the wicked and impenitent, and that, therefore, it is a most solemn and momentous truth, I ask your cool and dispassionate attention to this most important of our inquiries.

I am free to declare that man is a free agent, and that there is a wide difference between a *knowledge* of an event and the *action* material to its existence. What! because you or I know that daily such and such scenes are enacted before our eyes or done under our observation, can it, with any colour of truth or propriety, be maintained, that we, silent spectators, are the actors ourselves? O no, you will perhaps say, not in things present; and well may you say so. But what then? wherein would be any difference, admitting that we, as the Almighty is, were endowed with fore-knowledge? I can see none—there can be none. Not so, you will say, with God himself, and why not? If a rule is reasonable and holds good between man and the knowledge or agency of an action, why should it not with God? is He more liable to err than man? You admit that man is accountable for his actions to earthly tribunals; therefore, to be consistent, you must admit that he is a free agent *quo ad hoc*. If, then, he is accountable to man, why should he not be so to God?

It is true, that if God foreknew, from all eternity, that all events would take place, both good and evil, as they actually do take place, that they must of necessity take

their existence ; but this shows that, instead of God's being the author of sin and the enactor of all manner of decrees for its wide extension, he only simply decreed that man should be free to sin or not to sin, according to his sovereign uncontrollable pleasure—it only shows that God decreed that man should be a free agent, and of course accountable to him for the manner in which he should exercise that agency. Our own quick conceptions of what relatively is right and wrong, show that we are free agents. Our natural innate conscience, expressive frequently of such deep horrors and remorse, shows that we have the freedom of our wills, and that we are not mere passive machines. Our relation to God, he being the creator and we his creatures, shows, that considering we are endowed with *Reason*, we are free to exercise it, and of course accountable to him for the abuse of it. Now to the duration of punishment after death. We are told in the Scriptures, that it is to be eternal, everlasting—just as we are told that the rewards of the righteous are to be so, and the same terms are made use of, expressive of the time of the continuance of each. Carnal *Nature* knows nothing about either this punishment or this reward, and probably cares nothing about them. But divine *Revelation* assures us, in clear, emphatic, unequivocal terms, of the coming of *each*; and O ! how important it is to the final destiny and the speedy destiny of the whole human race, that the immense sums of account daily and momentarily gathering for an endless eternity, should be constantly and carefully examined.

Deist.—I will thank you not to preach to me, until you shall have convinced me of the truth of your doctrines.

Christian.—I was not, any more to you than to myself. I merely adverted to their importance, taking them for granted as true, as I am fully persuaded they are.—But admitting that they are not, and that there will be no hell or existence after death, shall we not be on the

safest side, while here upon earth in this life, by pursuing a life of continence, sobriety, temperance, innocence, and virtue?

Deist.—That I deny not—you are wandering from an important point between us, as if you approached it with an instinctive horror—I refer to endless punishment.

Christian.—O no, my friend, far from it—to that awful consideration my question had a direct and positive reference.

Deist.—I thought we had already come to mutual terms about pious frauds.

Christian.—You utterly mistake me. I do not say that it is right to preach a doctrine as true, knowing it to be false; but that, admitting for argument's sake, there is to be no reality in the doctrine of eternal punishment, are not all safe who do believe in it, and are the true disciples of the peaceful Lamb of God who gave himself a ransom for us?

Deist.—Well, say that this endless punishment is a Bible doctrine, and what then? Does that prove it true? First, it must appear beyond all controversy that the Bible is the word of God.

Christian. We will enter more into detail by and by. For the present, however, let me finish my remarks about endless punishment. If evil is odious to us, surely it must be so in the sight of God. So much at variance is sin with his holy character and immaculate government, that it is impossible for us to suppose he will ever suffer its pestilential influence to enter the gates of paradise. We can conceive of nothing more perfectly in accordance with his infinite perfections, than his complete triumph over it, by means of its everlasting banishment, and the authors, abettors, and upholders of it, from his divine presence. We see, upon earth, that although

crimes may be forgiven and partially passed over, they can never be forgotten. The remembrance of them lives and must live for ages. Upon the expiration of thousands of years, the recollection of them in the pages of history or in oral traditions, still survives. And until the soul of man shall be destroyed, and all its faculties, they will continue, though the world should stand for ten hundred thousands of millions of years. So dreadful is sin—so lamentable its effects. O how all benevolent hearts must long and struggle to arrest its downward progress! And can God, all perfection as he is, forget the vile acts of rebellious sinners, and receive them unwashed of their foul stains, with impenitent hearts and unbelieving minds, into the society of the just on high? Surely not. Had we no Bible to tell us so, it seems to me almost self-evident, that such a thing would be impossible and utterly repugnant to all ideas of propriety. After judgment, all things are final. Those who repent and believe before that period, go to glory in the society of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. Those who do not, cannot go to heaven, but must receive the sentence of everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord. Could we, by any possibility, subscribe to the doctrine of annihilation, and be led to believe that the wicked and impenitent might be finally dropped into non-existence, I should consider that the Devil would have far more cause to rejoice, as having finally triumphed over the Almighty, than he would have, as you intimate, when he might be in hell. He might say, Well, if I cannot with my followers gain possession of Heaven and crush the Almighty, I shall, at last, be sure of getting altogether out of pain, in a state of non-entity! So far from the Devil being uppermost when consigned to the regions of eternal torments, it is the Almighty who is uppermost—he measures out punishments and rewards in the scales and balances of exact and equal justice, and rejoices that the great work of punishment, richly deserved, is accomplished, in such a manner as forever, to all eternity, to put down Satan and all his angels and followers. Could it, by possibility, ever be otherwise, the

righteous and just in heaven would be no better off than the vilest offenders. Or, if the wicked, as the Universalists maintain, are finally to go to heaven, there can be no inducement for one to war against sin in this life—he is only a mere machine in the hands of God or the Devil, as the case may best suit; and the vilest are thus put upon a level with the best. We are not to suppose that the wicked will be all punished alike—no—there will doubtless be degrees of punishment, suited to the deserts of each; and, however greatly we may deplore the lot of the wicked thus consigned to the regions of eternal despair, we must be assured that it will be all to the glory of God, and as an essential link in the chain of his plan of justice, without the full exercise of which he would be partial, weak, and altogether imperfect.

Deist.—I will give you some reasons why I think the Bible is not the word of God:

1. Because, as you say, it inculcates the doctrine of endless punishment. Could my soul be wrought into such a pitch of frenzy or fanaticism, as actually to believe it, I know not what I should do. If I should be told that it was not the Almighty's fault, but man's fault, that hell must be his portion without Faith and Repentance, I should greatly wonder at that, when no one could deny that God would have the power to save all. Poor, finite, feeble, helpless, blind man—the bubble of an hour, with some of his faculties oftentimes inferior to some of those of the brutes, the victim of a thousand caprices, his mind the dupe of priests of a thousand different sorts of religion, the prey of disease that sometimes makes him believe that right is wrong and wrong is right; man, the unfortunate tenant of an existence forced upon him by this Almighty, is by him to be doomed to endless burnings; because, he, this same poor creature, man, only did that which he really did think would most contribute to his happiness! for I insist upon it, and I shall corner you up very closely if I mistake not, that the whole business is resolved into this very result. Do not the most depraved men, the highest order of criminals, at

the inception and consummation of their acts, *think*, that they are doing the very things best adapted to administer to their desires and gratify their wants? Know they any motives but those of bliss? A maniac, a hypocrite, or a parrot, only could answer in the negative. Look at the causes why men become the dupes of vice and criminality, and tell me candidly, are they not deceived through various causes, many of which are wholly out of their control? Tens of thousands commit violent assaults and batteries and homicides of the most flagitious kind, when under the influence of strong drink, who, without it and in their sober senses, would never have done the like.—Nor had they, when in the act of drinking their silly draughts, any wishes, expectations or intentions to do any thing but simply to administer to the wants of their foolish bibacious appetites. But, before they are aware of it, they are deprived of Reason, and are governed only by the impulses of downright madness and insanity.—Many a one does that, in a state I have just described, without a knowledge of what they are about, which they would utterly condemn and abhor when in a state of sobriety.

Christian.—Do you maintain that the highway robber, the thief, the manufacturer and passer of counterfeit money, the seducer of female innocence, or the cold blooded murderer, are to be excused, for any of the causes you have mentioned, or for any others that the fertility of your imagination might invent?

Deist.—No. They must all more or less be guilty to a certain extent. But I insist upon it that the criminal, whether of a higher or a lower grade, is acting under some *fatal power of deception*, that verily induces him to think that the gratifications of such and such passions, or the coming, by undue means, into the possession of such and such things, will make him *happier* than he otherwise would be; whereas the natural and inevitable consequences will be *an opposite result*. An error of judgment in part attends the guilt—this, in the sight

of a merciful God, I think, will, to a certain extent, extenuate all offenders; though I am willing to admit that it ought not, and never should, clear them from the pains and penalties reasonably inflicted by the laws of man in a state of civil society.

Bad company, diseases of mind, gross ignorance, long and inveterate habits, coercion or undue persuasion, mental imbecility, or natural defective organization, or constitutional meanness peculiar to certain stocks of blood, or extreme bodily sufferings, all have a powerful and almost unlimited influence over the various actions of the human species, giving a wrong bias to the better judgment, and in corrupting what otherwise might be a pure unsullied heart.

It is not possible to conceive of any thing more monstrous and shocking, more abhorrent to Reason and justice, than this abominable doctrine of endless punishment. We brand him justly, as a tyrant, who lays waste cities and countries with fire and sword, the exterminator of human kind both innocent and guilty, feeble old men and helpless women and children, merely to gratify an inordinate thirst of ambition, to glut a savage vengeance, or for the sake of conquest, plunder and rapine. We hear, with horror and detestation, of the barbarous massacre of helpless infants and defenceless women, by the murderous tomahawk and scalping knife. In short, all meanness, wickedness, injustice, cruelty and oppression, generally, meet with our dislike and hearty disapprobation. But what, *in direful effects*, are all the crimes which have ever stained humanity, and all the various species of misery which, from time immemorial, have ever afflicted mankind; what, I ask, are *all these in one immense, hideous bulk*, compared to the *single case of one individual*, condemned by the fierce inexorable wrath attributed to the Almighty, to the caverns of eternal wretchedness and despair? All the former, however deplorable and severe, have, comparatively speaking, but a momentary existence; the latter, when thousands of millions of ages have rolled away, can hardly be said to have dated its beginning! The Neros, and Bonapartes,

and Santa Annas, are, when the very worst, mild and merciful, compared to the Almighty, in the infliction of this horrible endless punishment, the end and design of which is not, as all rational punishment should be, to produce reformation ; is not (even after the manner of the murderous unfeeling Indians when butchering women and children) to exterminate—but to make wretchedness ten fold more horribly wretched, by being without the possibility of ever coming to an end ! Sir, I am fully satisfied that your Bible, supporting such tenets as these, cannot be the word of God.

Christian.—I am sorry that you should, in your warmth of argumentation, manifest a want of candour.—You most unwarrantably, as I conceive, lay the blame of sins upon the Almighty—you still urge that man is not a free agent, at least in substance. I must remind you, that you have not produced a single argument in support of such a strange theory ; and I take it for granted that you cannot. If man sins, it is his own fault, and not the Almighty's ; and if crimes are unrepented of, unpardoned, unatoned for, the punishment of hell, as endless as it must be, is only the fulfilment of infinite justice upon infinite evil, caused by an infinite being ; for man, when viewed intellectually, is not a finite but an immortal being. His mind, his soul, *can never die.*

Deist.—2. Another reason why I am not a Christian, is, that the New Testament requires, as essential to salvation, *involuntary acts of the mind* ; these are, Faith and Repentance. I believe a thing to be true, or not true, according to the evidence before me—and the act of the mind, or impressions made upon it by such evidence, do not proceed from the will or power of choosing or refusing, without which there can be neither guilt nor virtue ; but this act of the mind, and these impressions, frequently force themselves *directly and violently*, against our wills or desires. If I am absent from home, and my house is burned and all my property—the evidence of the calamity, upon my return, will be my own eyes,

not out of choice, (for if choice would have its reign in the matter, my eyes would never be the sorrowful witnesses of the loss) but from an irresistible power wholly unconnected with either guilt or its opposite. I *believe*, because I am *compelled* to believe. So it is with belief or faith, in every other possible case in which it may have an existence. We are neither virtuous nor vicious for believing or disbelieving in any thing; simply, *because* we act as mere machines; the mind being led to such conclusions or opinions or views, as it *cannot but* be led to, from the appearances, facts or reasonings before it. There cannot be a crime without a vicious intent; nor can there be a virtuous noble act without a good intent; but neither *the one* nor *the other* has any influence over the mind when it merely says to itself, this is the sun, this is the moon, these are the stars, this is water, this is land—this is not chalk, this is not bread but a stone, Mahomet was an impostor, Christ was the Son of God and died to redeem fallen man, &c. &c. You see it is plain, that faith, or belief in any thing, proceeds not from a corrupt or an honest heart, but from such testimonies, either physical or intellectual, as chance, accident, company or employment, may throw in the way; and that therefore it would be the height of absurdity to punish or reward one merely for such unavoidable results. Besides, Faith is truly, as you proclaim, the gift of God; and therefore man cannot be either justly praised or blamed, whether he has it, or whether he has it not. Faith is the gift of God; he so orders it, in his Providence, that man shall believe or disbelieve, according as what is before him by dire necessity impels him to do so.

Man is the creature of circumstances, and it is owing to their peculiar nature and not to his will, that he is induced to be sorry or not sorry for any of his acts. Thus *Repentance*, or sorrow, or contrition, is as involuntary as Faith or belief. Why is one ever sorry? Because he discovers that he has met, or will meet with, a loss—because some fond dreams or expectations of happiness, have not been or will not be realized—because, when

through ignorance or corruption, (the effects of causes I have already adverted to,) he has done wrong ; he discovers it did not promote his happiness as he anticipated.—Collateral or extrinsic circumstances, then, (which take place probably *against* his will) are what superinduce *Repentance*. It is not an improved heart, therefore, which gives impulse to Repentance, any more than to Faith—though *the effects* of both Faith and Repentance may be salutary and productive of reformation and virtue. If one *believes* that a life of honesty and integrity will advance his happiness, it is well. If one is *sorry* for the commission of sins, it is well ; for experience has probably shown him how mistaken he was in former ways of life, how utterly opposed to his best interests were his previous bad practices. But it is the Providence of God, and not the virtues of man, that make him *believe* that right is *right*, and that cause him to be *sorry* for *wrong*. This I consider to be the true theology, that God overrules all for good and that man is one among his creatures that is destined, in his divine economy, to further his holy views. God rules over all—his Providence, deep laid, is in every thing that takes place, and man is only a constituted agent to lengthen out his plan of perfections. Away, therefore, with your endless hell, as brought about merely through the want of Faith and Repentance.

Christian.—How it is that God's overruling evil for good, and being the Superintendent of all things that are finally to advance his glory, is an evidence of man's want of free choice in *Faith* and *Repentance*, I cannot conceive. You admit that good does proceed from them—you admit that there is such a thing as guilt ;—if so, it is just to conclude, in the one case, that true religion has some happy influence when this *Faith* and this *Repentance* are roused into action ; and that, in the other, man is a free agent, and of course, accountable for his actions to the Author of his being. Although Faith is the gift of God, it is the result of a prayerful heart on the part of man, of the proper and rational use of his faculties, of a determination to abide by "the truth as it is in Jesus,"

and to banish forever from his presence, the father of lies. The want of a proper exercise of Faith, when God, by the workings of his providence, knocks at his heart and warns him to shun the deceptive fallacies of unbelief, is as sinful as fornication, adultery, the violation of the sabbath, or any other overt act forbidden by our religion. — You say we are neither good nor bad for believing or disbelieving in any thing, as we are mere machines and act under a fatal power of compulsion. There is manifest inconsistency in your principles. If you admit that man sometimes sins, you admit that he is guilty; and for one to have a guilty heart and at the same time to act solely under a compulsory power against his will, is a plain absurdity. It is the *truth* alone and *Faith* in the truth, that will lead us in the right way. *These* alone give an evidence of the character of the heart—*they* tell whether one is virtuous or vicious, good or bad; *they* tell whether one is *choosing* that good part which can never be taken from him, and whether he *refuses* to do that “sin which doth so easily beset him,” and it is impossible for one to refuse believing in God and refuse a sorrow and repentance for sins without manifesting such a corrupt heart as is ready to be led to do all manner of evil. The sinner, in the hardness of his heart, in his impenitence and his determination not to embrace “the truth as it is in Jesus,” but to suffer himself to be the willing instrument of anarchy and misrule, wickedness and unrighteousness, acts under no fatal power of necessity. His conscience tells him when he is in the wrong—and if the wrong was ordered directly by God, it would not be a wrong, but a thing directly the reverse. The power of conscience would be given to no purpose, if man was not a free agent. And this I consider sufficient to decide the question, without advert-ing to any thing else. God makes nothing in vain—it would be utterly incompatible with his wisdom that he should; and as God has given conscience as an index of the hardness of the heart or of its amendment and regeneration, it is clear that man is left to the freedom of his own will,

Deist.—You say that Faith is the gift of God—if so, is it the work of man? I think not—even you admit that it is rather the result of prayer, &c. than an original meritorious act. Your ground of making Faith an act of virtue is utterly untenable—it is a neutral act, denoting neither a corrupt nor a pure heart. Whether a man has long legs or short legs, “red plush breeches” or sailor trowsers on, whether he sits cross-legged or in a different position, denotes not whether his mind is bent on good or evil. Just so it is with a thing that is *merely a matter of opinion*, for the reasons I have already stated. There is a great distinction between *opinions* and *crimes*. The *first* may, when incorrect, lead unintentionally into error; the *last* are positive wilful errors themselves. The *first*, when wrong, are generally caused by misfortune, ignorance, or a judgment biassed by false views from unreasonable prejudices, or putting wrong construction upon facts that may have been incorrectly stated, and may lead, and frequently do lead, to the *latter*; but each, in their peculiar natures and characteristics, are separate and distinct, because they are, like the winkings of one’s eyes and like our acts of respiration, altogether involuntary, about which the conscience (your prime minister of evidence in this matter) has no more to do than the Sultan of Turkey had in the formation of American Constitutions of civil government. But in the *latter*, the conscience (which is partly the creature of nature, and partly the creature of education) has, it is true, an agency, which only proves that men, when they do wrong, know it; not that when they do an *involuntary act*, or entertain a *mere speculative opinion*, they deserve the punishment of endless hell-fire. Your doctrine may receive the belief of silly old women, or of minds of a very inferior cast, or of such as may not consider how far prejudice, and fashionable, long received opinions, may lead one astray from the truth; but really, it appears to me to be as useless as it is unreasonable. It is what may sometimes frighten the virtuous timid, but it is a bugbear that, I am confident, seldom if ever hinders the commission of crimes. It therefore receives my contempt as well as abhorrence.

Christian.—I agree with you, that there is a great difference between speculative opinions and overt crimes that come under the jurisdiction of human codes. But you must consider that when God commands a thing to be done by us, let it be what it will, it becomes our duty to obey. We are commanded *to believe* in his name, and to *repent* of our sins. Human and divine laws differ very widely in their scope and objects. What may be legitimate with and well ordered by God, may not be so in man. Human laws have reference only to the things of this life; but Christ says that “his kingdom is not of this world.” The laws of God are for regulating the conduct of man in an especial manner with regard to an eternal state of existence after death; and as He has commanded us to believe in him and to repent, if we do not, we absolutely disobey his positive command, and we must suffer the consequences of their violation. Under such circumstances, to maintain that, when these laws are disobeyed, men must, of necessity, act without a proper freedom of will, appears to be impossible; and the *conscience* has as much to do with these laws as any other laws; or, at all events, the heart of every sinner *ought* to be conscience smitten for neglecting the way of salvation as ordered by God. But sorry I am that the “consciences” of too many are “seared as with a hot iron.”

Deist.—I confess here you have penned me up pretty closely: and could I really believe that the Bible was the Word of God, I might reconcile myself to the propriety of being ordered to do what might, under human laws, be a foolish act or a thing impossible to be done, such, for instance, as *Faith*; but the truth is, I have no faith in the Bible, and of course have no faith in your doctrines.

Christian.—Then it is so much the worse for you.

Deist.—So you think; but I think differently. But
3. Another reason why I do not believe in the Bible,

2

is, the laws, on the pretended or supposed observance or non-observance of which, hangs man's eternal destiny, are not by any means universally promulgated. What! am I to be told that hell must be the portion of all that part of mankind who never had an opportunity of hearing of Jesus Christ, when there are millions, and probably will be thousands of millions, among that number? There is no justice, no reason, in such a thing. It is well settled by geographers, that an immense majority of the different orders among the human race, have been for thousands of years, and are, Pagans, or those who had or have no knowledge of the Christian religion. Are all these to deserve damnation merely because they die without faith? for, let them have ever so goodly a portion of repentance, they, according to your dogma, cannot see God and go to heaven. O, what a degradation upon the human understanding is such an idea! How can one have faith in Christ, when he never heard of Christ?—There is an utter impossibility in one's having a knowledge or belief of a thing, when no shade of evidence could have been presented him on which to form even conjectures about it. And must man be damned because he would not achieve an impossibility? Must man, by an edict of Him who is the very fountain of mercies, be condemned to an endless hell, because he failed of doing that which he could not have performed, had ten thousand worlds been offered him? No, never. There is a darkness, a deception, an imposition, concerning this hell, brought about by priests, commentators, booksellers, tract printers, and their agents, which plainly show that money-making, and nothing but money-making, is at the bottom of the whole business. Human law-givers promulgate their edicts, and publish their statutes, that those on whom they are to operate may have a knowledge of their purport; and it is required by the indispensable dictates of justice and reason. But God Almighty, the fountain of justice, it seems, is not going by any such rule—not unlike the tyrannical judge who condemns without hearing, he is to inflict the most horrible punishment because some of his helpless creatures did not be-

lieve in what it was impossible for them to believe in, circumstanced as most Pagans are! If such are to be among the consequences of what you term Divine Revelation, God save us from its abominations. But the prevalence of the Christian religion, you will say, humanizes mankind, makes them more sociable and refined, and every way better neighbours, better citizens, and better subjects. The Christian man, you will say, who lives up to his profession, will be a peaceable, quiet, moral, inoffensive man. Was it fairly settled even among Christians themselves, to whom it is agreed that the gospel must be promulgated, (if it be known and understood any where,) I say, was it well agreed even among this boasted pure portion of mankind, *what really is forbidden or not forbidden by their laws*, the question would be susceptible of a more determinate answer. In countries where Christianity has prevailed extensively, certain it is that long, cruel, revengeful, bloody, unprovoked, destructive wars have been waged; and generally, the God of Heaven is invoked by the belligerents *on both sides*, for his special grace and favour. The slave trade, both foreign and domestic, is carried on by Christians—even the pulpit, and governors in their annual exposes and messages to state legislatures, in the southern part of the American Union, thunder their anathemas against its extinction, and advocate the propriety of it both in a *civil* and *religious* point of view. Cheating, fraud, drunkenness, and debauchery, prevail among Christian nations in tens of millions of instances—even in the United States, where the majority is immense who profess the Christian religion, it is estimated that more than 600 murders are annually committed. Really, my friend, many of your doctrines are so absurd, that I am inclined to think more hypocrites, than reformed men and women, are made by Christianity. It is *fashionable* to go to church—it is *fashionable* to get baptized and make a great ado about good things—and so men and women *pretend* to have what they do not *possess*. A pretence, an insincere avowal of belief, a hollow promise, are allied to downright knavery of heart, which never augurs

well for, and never does promote, the good of mankind in any capacity whatever, public, private, religious, or political.

Christian.—It is true that, in countries of vast extent, inhabited by an immense number of millions, even where Christianity prevails most extensively, there are a great many bad men. But look at countries where the light of Christianity shines but imperfectly or not at all, and it will be found that the barbarities of the various sorts of Pagan religions, is dreadful, and far worse than the effects of the hypocrisy of pretended Christians. The truth is, although Christianity may be the religion most prevalent in a country, there are still a vast number of infidels whose principles tell them little about God, nothing about hell, and who consequently have very slight checks upon the impetuosity of their passions, and very little to hinder them from the foulest of deeds. It is foreign to the nature of the true Christian to be led into crimes—the quiet and inoffensiveness of such an one is incontestable. You complain of wars among Christian nations—but are wars confined to them? far from it. Fighting and robbery, if not a part of Pagan and Mahomedan religions, are scarcely ever suppressed or inert among them. It is true, that Christians differ among themselves, whether *defensive wars* may not sometimes be justified—but all agree that *offensive wars* are strictly forbidden; and if there was an universal opposition to *such*, there could be *no other*—if there were none of the *latter* there could be none of the *former*. Again—although Christians universally agree, that the foreign slave trade is not to be justified, they do not all perfectly agree in opinion whether the existence of domestic slavery should be tolerated or not—neither do Deists. Your suggestion, then, of this matter, has hardly any bearing upon the points about which we differ. Both Christians and Deists advocate slavery, and both oppose it—and whether it be or be not the doctrine of the New Testament, that a state of slavery is beneficial both to bondsmen and freemen, or a curse to both, neither proves nor disproves the gospel

to be of divine origin. But you seem not to be correctly informed about the true doctrine of gospel salvation, with reference to the heathen nations. True it is, the more it is spread, and the better it is understood by the preaching of faithful ministers, the better chance there will be for the wicked, unbelieving, and impenitent, to forsake the errors of their ways. The spirit of God does, doubtless, pierce the souls of even the heathen, who never heard the preaching of the word, and cause them to tremble in his divine presence, and believe in his power, to the repentance of their sins, and the happy deliverance of their souls from the darkness of the natural man ; so that they may not all be lost who live even in heathen nations—but they stand in much more imminent danger of being lost for want of light and knowledge, than do those to whom the word is regularly preached in due season. Again ; you are shocked at the hypocrisy of Christians—let me tell you that a Christian *cannot* be a hypocrite—the truth alone, and the mighty power of it, against which not even “the gates of hell can prevail,” alone influence him ; a real Christian is not a pretended Christian, any more than counterfeit money is genuine good money ; and the pretences of a hypocrite weigh nothing more against the value of the pious man, than does the worthlessness of base money detract from the usefulness of that which is genuine.

Deist.—But admitting that a genuine Christian must always be a good man, does that prove that a Deist cannot be a good man ? I think not. The religion of nature, that conscience which God has given every creature of rational faculties under the sun, those innate immutable principles which tell all the difference between right and wrong, operate upon Christians as well as upon Deists. Indeed, a great part of the rules which Christians lay claim to, as peculiar to themselves, are only lights borrowed from nature and reason. “Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, honour thy father and mother,” &c., are among the number. If you are willing to give the Devil his due, you ought to be willing to give

the God of nature his due, and all those rules which he sanctions, as well among nations where the Bible is never read, as among those where it is.

Christian.—I admit that there is such a thing as natural religion, and that it is good ; but that does not prove that divine revelation is not better. But whatever may be said about the hypocrisy or imperfections of professed Christians, (and it is a lamentable fact that the lives of many such denote their moral unsoundness and shortsightedness,) it cannot be denied but that all which is virtuous and good might be objected to, if Christianity should be condemned on such grounds. Men, at best, even in a state of regeneration, are still fallible ; and although their desires, intentions, and earnest endeavours, are always exerted to do the will of the Lord, promote “ peace on earth and good will to men,” extend the hand of charity to all, and by every possible means to dry up the bitter sources of human suffering, both natural and moral ; yet it ought to be borne in mind, that, after all that can be done in this life towards reaching the summit of perfection, the judgment and understanding of the best of Christians still is extremely weak and imperfect. But it is not right to condemn errors of judgment as we do those of the heart—if there were no distinction to be drawn between them, I know not what rules could be laid down to suppress evil, vindicate innocence, punish vice, or reward virtue.

Ministers of the gospel are often abused for receiving salaries. But if any sort of labour is worthy of hire, I should think that that labour which had a design to secure the temporal and eternal salvation of man, ought to meet with an abundant reward. How they can fulfil their missions, how the preachers of Christ can spend their whole time in the duties of their vocations, without food, raiment, or the comforts of life, or how their wives and children can be supported, and the protectors and heads of such families be compelled to leave them to the merciless storms of a pitiless world, unheeded and unassisted, I have yet to learn. Nor how mechanics can print Bibles, tracts, and other benevolent works, designed to

aid the spread of religion and truth, and the suppression of vice and all its attendant miseries, and receive no wages, I have yet to learn also. If one thousandth part of the money paid at grog-shops was withheld from its foul and unholy uses, and given to destitute, honest, sincere preachers of the word, and to their auxiliaries, I doubt not that we should all see an amazing difference in the change for the good of the world.

Many of the commandments of the divine law, you intimate, are only borrowed from the common universal law of nature. But, because, for instance, murder is prohibited by *both*, does it follow, that there is no genuine law concerning the awful offence, except the uncertain, vague one, written upon the too frequently callous heart of man? You might as well say, that although two and two make four, yet three and one do not make that number. You have expressed regrets that there is so much sophistry in the world; I will join you in those lamentations—I will go further—I will pray that we *both* may be saved from the manifold errors to which all sophistry and false reasoning inevitably lead.

Deist.—4. I do not believe the Bible is of divine revelation, because some of the acts forbidden under pain of eternal damnation, are not *mala in se*, not bad in themselves, but are such as do not have, of necessity, any particular connexion between good and evil, but are mere arbitrary rules, and what in human laws would be mere political prohibitions. The violation of the sabbath is among this number; and profane swearing may be classed with it. From this, you need not suppose that I am opposed to the institution of the sabbath, or would justify the folly, levity, and blasphemy of the profane swearer. No. It is very well that one day in seven should be set apart as a day of rest; and I am willing that all Christians should enjoy it in the worship of God according to the dictates of their consciences. Profane swearing deserves the execration of all persons of decency and propriety, and will receive it. But the violation of neither, is attended, in common, with that baseness and

corruption of heart which show a positive evidence and inevitable consciousness of guilt. To cut a few sticks of fire wood at one's private dwelling in the country, would be a violation of the sabbath, but there would be no innate wickedness in the act, any more than in not attending a militia muster when the law requires it. The law requires that men of property shall pay a certain amount of taxes against a certain time, or otherwise be subjected to the payment of an additional amount. Now the non-payment of the first tax, although required by law, is not a sin, in itself considered—it is only bad because prohibited—it is only bad, because, if all persons of property in a community should fail, in like manner, of paying their taxes, the said community, in its political capacity, might undergo an inconvenience. So in a violation of the sabbath—a trifling instance of its violation may not disturb a majority of citizens disposed to enjoy the quiet of private rest and meditation, or the exercises of religious worship—but a *great many* such instances would; and the law requiring an observance of the sabbath, is wisely designed to guard against any one's being disturbed in his reasonable quietness; but any other day of the week than the one now set apart for that purpose, would answer just as well, which shows that its violation is merely *malum prohibitum* and not *malum in se*, just as profane swearing is, and just as fornication is, or even adultery. How many take the names of God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Ghost, into their lips irreverently, without any design or intent to inflict any injury whatever upon either any human being or upon the said "person or persons." Will it be said that there can be a crime without a vicious intent? I deny it *in toto*, and ask for any reasons that sophistry itself could pretend to give, in support of such an irrational doctrine. Civil injuries may be done by fellow mortals to each other, in their persons or property, *without design*, through mere casualty, or by compulsion, or by carelessness or neglect, which, for the well being of society, it would be highly impolitic and unjust to suffer to pass off without rendering the perpetrators, or those who were lacking in

duty, liable to make just compensation to the persons injured—hence the great difference made in human laws between civil injuries and public crimes. If one of my beasts gets into my neighbour's enclosure, (he having a lawful fence,) and injures or destroys the property of my neighbour, it is, on my part, a civil injury, and I, by law, founded upon the principles of natural justice, am compelled to make due satisfaction—but I am not viewed in the light of a criminal. A thousand instances of profane swearing might be mentioned, found in daily practice among the brave tars of the ocean, and among millions of persons of different callings, which, so far from being done with an *intent* to do a wrong, are merely caused by levity, or without due reflection. I admit it is proper, considering, especially, that God's name is always invoked when witnesses are qualified before our courts of law to speak the truth, that profane swearing should receive the human punishment it does—but I do not believe it is an offence that is sufficiently weighty to send any poor mortals to an endless hell. In fact, there is nothing infamous in the folly of profane swearing, as in the case of theft and the like, because the foolish act is not accompanied by *any intention* to do an injury. A religion which makes every vanity a high crime, must be a false religion. There ought to be reason in every thing.

Fornication is another of the crimes, which, unrepented of, it seems, is to be fraught with eternal damnation; with what propriety, it may be proper to inquire. Although, under the Jewish laws, the crime of fornication was justly punishable, as it is by all human civil laws, yet men were allowed to have a plurality of wives. The same practice has prevailed among many Pagan nations, and in all Mahomedan countries, for ages. That adultery, fornication, and bigamy, are not violations of the law of nature, must be evident. If bigamy and polygamy were allowed in old time by the special law of God, would there have been any thing infamous in them?—No—that would have been impossible. No one law of the universe has a more powerful certain influence, than that which calls for the natural increase of population.—

A piece of iron protruded into the air, must fall to the earth ; water runs down hill—and why ? because the law of nature orders them to do so, just as this same law commands an addition to the number of the human race. There is nothing base in the fulfilment of this last branch of law, any more than there is in the falling of water down hill. Human laws, and different systems of religion, differ in their regulations concerning intercourse between the sexes, out of various causes. The truth is, the institution of marriage is a mere matter of civil or political economy—and whether a man shall be allowed one or more wives, depends on the circumstances with which he may be surrounded, such as climate, abundance of provisions or the necessaries and comforts of life, the proportion of males to females, &c. Political inconveniences result from fornication—hence it is forbidden.—So the regulation of water courses, such as rivers and canals, is a proper thing to administer to the good of the community. There may result many more conveniences and advantages, from the location of a canal, or the clearing of the bed of a river, in one part of a country than in another. Positive evils, in fact, might flow from a canal and its reservoirs being located in some particular districts, on account of the unhealthiness that they might generate, which would be avoided elsewhere. But as there is nothing naturally infamous or wicked in any of these, so there is not, in fornication, adultery, or bigamy, though evils result sometimes from them ; hence none of them can have any thing to do with an eternal punishment in hell. Crimes, it is true, merely *mala prohibita*, are sometimes, for very urgent reasons, by human laws punished with severities and infamies as great as those inflicted for crimes *mala in se*, or against nature ; still, when viewed in the abstract, the sins of fornication, adultery, &c., are of the same species as any others which are forbidden or not forbidden, according to the wants, fears, or various circumstances of a community. You see by this, that there would be just as much reason for one to insist upon the punishment of an endless hell, for not attending a militia muster, or for riding on the tow path of a

canal against "the statute in such case made and provided," as for committing fornication, adultery, &c., or for a violation of the sabbath ; political evils and inconveniences, in a greater or less degree, resulting from them all, while none of them are against nature, though all are against law. I tell you, my friend, I am for this world and the things of this world ; for if we so conduct ourselves as not to infringe upon the rights of others, and pass our time innocently and usefully, we do just what is right in pursuing a proper course of happiness. Another world, I know nothing about—care nothing about ; and if I am innocent and happy, why need I ? "The proper study of mankind is man,"—let us pursue it then, and let what must be hidden from human view entirely alone. Let us be virtuous, and we shall have no occasion to "repent of sins." The book of nature tells what man is—and sufficiently what God is—let us peruse its pages, then, to the discomfiture of lying priests and the edification of our souls.

Christian.—Nature is too dark for me—I want something brighter.

Deist.—Yes—and you take something darker.

Christian.—When you shall convince me that the sins of drunkenness, fornication, sabbath breaking, profane swearing, &c., are no worse than the failure to attend a militia muster, I will agree that your philosophy is better than the Bible. There is much to admire in the book of nature—and no wonder—its author is God ; but still many of its blank leaves show that its great work is unfinished. Not so in the book of Divine Revelation, the Holy Bible. It is written by the same master hand, whose genius is inspiration, whose light dazzles the sun, and whose language is the simplicity of truth. It is a production perfectly finished. Nothing can diminish its importance. It shows that God is good, and that man can go to heaven if he will. It opens the door to eternal never ending happiness in the world to come. While

it convinces us of the vanity of this world, and all the things of it, it assures us that another and a better awaits us.

Deist.—High sounding words of vanity—nothing but the creatures of fancy.

Christian.—You may call them what you please ; but I know that my *belief* in a future state, joined to a consciousness that the Redeemer has graciously been pleased to pardon my sins, is worth more to me than all things else besides. But you seem displeased, because some of the same crimes which you term bad because they are prohibited, and not because they are so in their intrinsic nature, are, like those of a more heinous character, forbidden by the scriptures under pain of that death of damnation which Christ and his apostles have published to the world. If human laws should prohibit *all*, which they do, why should not the laws of God do the same? You admit that these crimes are prolific of evils, (all of them more or less,) and that those human codes which forbid them are contrived in wisdom—why, then, should not God do as much good in his moral government as man does in his? When you shall convince me that man has a better right to prevent the evils of crimes than God has, or will be more efficacious and energetic in arresting their progress than God, then I will agree that there is more light in your religion of nature than in revealed religion. If there is vanity in a belief of the immortality of the soul, what, I ask, can there be better in a state of annihilation or of doubt and uncertainty? I should think that there must be more vanity in the noise and filth of drunkenness, in sabbath breaking and profane swearing, and in the sinks of debauchery, than in the peaceable, quiet, neat, decent, orderly deportment of a meek and humble Christian.

Deist.—5. Another reason I will give in defence of my principles. Some of the Bible laws prohibit the free exercise of nature's laws in a tyrannical manner, as in:

the case of marriage, which, however wretched it be, can never by them be dissolved except for adultery. Here human laws step in and grant some relief; wilful absence, corporal frigidity, intolerable cruelty and oppression, imprisonment of one of the parties in the penitentiary, &c., being, in many states, sufficient causes to induce courts to dissolve the contract. I do not think that a doom of perpetual misery in this world, will qualify us for happiness in another; if I did, I would be in favour of getting myself burnt every month and half roasted at a slow fire. I do not believe that the code of Christian rules of action is a "perfectly finished" code, because it leaves half its work to be performed by fallible men. Much better would it be that the old law of polygamy was revived, than that the contract of marriage could never be dissolved except for adultery.

Christian.—Our religion considers marriage as a solemn rite, made in pursuance of promises by each party faithfully to lead Christian lives in the fear of the Lord, and to the glory of his holy name. It is considered that they are joined in the bands of holy wedlock by God; hence it is commanded that "what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." And if both parties give themselves up faithfully to the service of the Lord, there will be no occasion for a separation for any of the causes you have mentioned. "The kingdom of Christ is not of this world," neither do his followers seek so much the fleeting transitory pleasures of this world, as they do the enduring treasures of the heavenly Jerusalem. The world, and all the things of the world, are not so much as a drop in the ocean compared to the heavenly joys of eternity. You think the most of time—I think the most of the world to come, which can have no end!

Deist.—"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Christian.—But if the bird in the hand is worthless, I would rather have the two in the bush, when I could rest assured that they would both be extremely valuable and could never die.

See page 37

Deist.—6. Another reason why I do not look up to the Bible as divine authority, is, that some of its laws are too vague, loose, and uncertain, in their meaning, as in the case of homicide, the sabbath, &c. What is meant by the command, “Thou shalt not kill,” is not clear.—May one kill another in self-defence, or in the execution of the law, as when an officer undertakes to arrest a criminal and meets with such resistance as would cause the malefactor to escape if the officer did not make use of violent means? The one is called excusable, the other justifiable homicide, by the common law of England and the United States. Again; we are commanded to “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” But it is not settled among Christians, what day is the true sabbath day—and the Jews hold to a sabbath of their own. Does it seem reasonable that man’s eternal destiny should depend upon such uncertainties? It does not. A religion which sanctions such imperfections, cannot be a true religion. It must be a forged religion—a religion of imposture, designed to gull the unthinking, ignorant, credulous multitude, by knaves and tyrants and unprincipled artful men, who are willing to preach and defend *any thing for money*. I tell you that I am, likewise, myself, fond of money, as the procurer of the good things which the world affords; but I do not put on any cap of disguise to seek it—I labour for it, and am always willing to give the best *quid* I can for a reasonable *quo*—always ready to give a satisfactory equivalent for it. Yes, I am fond of the good things of this world, for I see that many of them are valuable “birds in the hand,” which I would not exchange for any thing a preacher might give me in expectancy. By the bye, all Christians, and especially preachers, are as fond of having “birds in the hand” that will sing (or money that will chink) as we are.

Christian.—It is generally conceded by philosophers, that the choicest happiness is seated in the mind—that it consists of a hope and belief of something to come, something better than any thing in possession. Brutal and brief, and soon surfeited, is all sensual enjoyment;

that, however, which is intellectual, is always capable of expanding itself—stretches its work to the stars and to the utmost bounds of the universe, and is never content without flying to the mansions of the celestial paradise, where infinity and bliss and perfection reign at the footstool of God.

Deist.—I would not exchange the having of two or three wives at once, or a good dinner of beef-steak, or a quart of good wholesome cider, or a breakfast of good coffee and mackerel, *in actual possession*, for all we both know about futurity. A fig for things in expectancy.—I wish the law allowed me to have more wives than one; then, when my eyes should become tired of feasting on the splendours and beauties of one, I would turn them upon another. So if one should get cross and ill-natured at any unlucky time, I would seek the caresses of another. There is a great refinement in the pleasures of the soul. I know they are innumerable, and so are their pains—but what is the soul worth, when the body is in torment? If the last is in distress, the other must always be in distress also, and that to a greater extent in proportion to its poignancy.

Christian.—Really, I should think that if I had one good wife, I should feel very awkward in courting another at the same time.

Deist.—Why so? If one has got enough for them to eat, drink, and wear, no matter how great their number may be. So that I and they, and all parties interested, are happy, it is all right. *If—*

Christian.—Stop my friend, that *if* is a great word.—If a man in tolerable circumstances should have a *hundred* children to maintain from his wives, I am of opinion he would find that the pleasures of the mind, and especially those founded upon well grounded hopes, were far more solid than all else he would have put together. You ask what is the soul worth when the body is in tor-

ment? I will tell you. It supports one to meet with fortitude, and even cheerfulness, the severest privations, the greatest distresses in life, and to meet the horrors of death itself with composure. It is an undaunted and unconquerable spirit of the soul that gives vigour and energy to the soldier, and to all, under sufferings which frequently are worse than death. It is this spirit which is the root of all virtue and the foundation of all nobleness of heart. It arms the explorer of unknown regions with that dauntlessness indispensable to protect him from the hidden dangers with which he is surrounded. It cheers the martyr and murdered innocents even when consigned to the axe of the executioner and the flames of fagots. It is only in surmounting difficulties that we are truly great. Your mug of cider, your half a dozen of wives, &c., look truly insignificant, compared to that reward which belongs to a life of temperance and virtue. That reward is attended with a "peace which passeth all understanding."

You cavil about the command "thou shalt not kill," &c. It must be evident enough, that a killing in self-defence is excusable, or otherwise God would not have commanded the wars which he did, as described in the Old Testament. What is termed justifiable homicide, rests also upon a similar reasonable excuse and necessity, which are indispensable for the due execution of a wholesome municipal law. And none but a person void of understanding, would or could believe that a killing by mere accident was criminal. Frivolous, too, are your objections against the sabbath law. If there is any uncertainty about the right day, that uncertainty is undoubtedly caused by the misconceptions and wilful obstinacy of its enemies, for to all useful and salutary institutions it seems there must be enemies. My friend, I trust you will yet see the folly and error of infidelity.

Deist.—I admit that a quart of pure sweet water would be better than that much cider. Water is nature's beverage—"it is angel's drink." I like Nature and the angels, for by the name of angels do I distinguish virtuous women from those who are not.

Christian.—Very well, you have retracted one error—you have given up your mug of cider, *one eighth* of which is poisonous alcohol; and you will, ere long, I hope, be satisfied that one wife will more conduce to your happiness than a plurality of them. I have no objections against your appellation of virtuous women—you may call them angels if you please. Superior and all-commanding, however, as is their natural beauty, their mental beauty, or those associations which are derived from nobleness of soul and the uncontaminated influence of intellectual grandeur and moral virtue, far outweigh, far outstrip, all that chiefly can only please the eye or the mere animal gaze. Nothing but an union of natural and moral beauty can make perfection, and the last is the chief ingredient in its composition.

Deist.—We agree perfectly in this. But suffer me to add another reason, 7. Why I do not believe in the Bible. *It is because its truth is honestly and sincerely doubted.* It is pretended that the Bible is divine revelation—but it is so in name and not in reality. Any thing left in darkness and doubt, cannot be *revealed*.—The very assertion is a contradiction in itself. Nature and her stupendous works are *revealed*, because they are plainly laid open before us. The sun in the firmament is *revealed* to us, but any thing which may be believed in or not, is mere matter of opinion, or depends on various and contradictory explanations; any thing, in short, which is full of uncertainty, so full that it is the cause of bloodshed and tyranny, cannot be *revelation*. The asseveration that it is such, is a mockery of the human understanding, an exercise of the trade of priestcraft, and is disreputable in the highest degree.

But let a book be called Revelation or not, it cannot be true, or its commands cannot be of binding efficacy, when it makes one's honest doubts of its belief penal, and subjects him to the punishment of hell-fire. I have already given you my reasons why a belief in a thing, or non-belief in it, is an involuntary act, and therefore, in a moral point of view, perfectly harmless and wholly

unconnected with good and evil. It is a notorious fact, that thousands and tens of thousands, probably millions, who have had good opportunities to form unbiassed opinions upon the truth and authenticity of the Bible, have expressed a deliberate and sober conviction of its being altogether of human invention. This one consideration weighs volumes of testimony upon my side of the question. It cannot be got over. This alone, independent of all things else that may with so much truth and justice be urged against it, most conclusively settles the controversy. Rules of action, pregnant with such important consequences as to involve the endless misery or happiness of the whole human race, must all be clear, unequivocal, and not by any possibility subject to contradictory constructions—they must be self evident and published to all the world, so that *every one* subject to their authority can see them, read them, or know them, otherwise they would reflect dishonour upon the moral goodness of God, and his holy character as a perfect Lawgiver, Ruler, and Judge. It is not so with those of the Bible—hence their authority is denied and disbelieved in by some, and doubted by others. And as long as there are either sincere unbelievers or honest doubters, I shall rest assured that I am safe without them, if I only obey the laws of nature and of human society.

Christian.—If truths should all be rejected, because some persons might entertain doubts about their being such, I know not hardly what we could believe in.—Those dull apprehensions and cankered prejudices which make men believe things unreal which must and cannot be otherwise than true, are not a few. Thousands do not believe that the earth goes round the sun, but that does not prove the theory illusory. What connexion there can be between the existence of facts and a doubt of their existence, or what connexion there can be between a narration of those facts and doubts of their authenticity, touching the reality of those facts or the correctness of such a narration, I have yet to be informed. No events, however important, have ever transpired—no laws, how-

ever interesting, have ever been published, which, by possibility, might not be supposed by some few, as having either not had an existence, or as having never been enacted. Various accidents, many peculiar circumstances, or a multiplicity of designs, intrigues, or contrivances, might operate to cause one to doubt of many a self evident thing, (or what would be self evident, if some of the rubbish were removed, rubbish in the way of truth, thus produced both by accident and design.) For six months of the year, at both of the poles of the earth alternately, the sun is not visible, and it probably would not be a difficult matter for an astrologer or a mountebank, to induce silly old women to believe that it never might shine again—but their want of faith, or doubts about the regular course of the sun, would not hinder it from progressing in its usual way. The truth is, a belief, or disbelief, a doubt, or an assurance, that such and such things are or are not so, prove nothing—they establish nothing—pull down nothing, and have no bearing upon the matter. Hence, whether one believes that the French Revolution of the last century did actually occur or not, neither proves nor disproves the matters of fact recorded in its train. Hence, whether one believes or disbelieves in the Bible, does neither establish its truth nor show its divine authority, nor condemn it as a book of fable or imposture. A belief, however, in Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the world, is a fulfilment of one of the commands of God. But the doing of a thing which God has commanded, or the not doing it, neither proves nor disproves that such a command did come from Him; therefore, the absurdity of your conclusions and the futility of your argument must here be apparent. The Bible contains the history of the origin of man, of his fall from a state of innocence in Paradise, and an account of the means which must be made use of to regain his lost estate and be made happy with God and Christ in Heaven forever. It is the joint production of various inspired men, whom the Lord had appointed to do his holy work and make known his will. It is written and printed in various languages. Ministers are ordained and appointed, by his

authority, to publish and explain the whole. Considering the length of time it would take to record all that is written in the Old and New Testaments, in order that it should be permanent, and handed down from age to age, and from generation to generation, it seems clear enough that no better method could be adopted to suit the various conditions of men, and to answer the wise and benevolent purposes of God, than that made choice of by Him in the writing and publication of his divine Word. So many are the infirmities under which men labour, so dark are they in their understandings, and so prone are they to sin and evil, that a Revelation of his character, and his wishes and determinations respecting the world, seems absolutely indispensable. The just and upright in this life, want something to rely on as a lasting security for future happiness. This the Bible gives them. Christ appears to them as all in all—he extends his pardoning arms to all true believers, and to all who have felt that godly sorrow for sin which leadeth unto life eternal—he assures them of the infinite mercy in store for them, and the certainty of their being made partakers of an eternity of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Again; the wicked, the unregenerate and impenitent, who, “as the sparks fly upward,” do continually those things which are evil in the sight of God and hurtful to men, all want, all stand in need of correction and amendment. What is contained in God’s Word, and what, in pursuance of it, is preached by his servants, is the desired antidote to the poison of infidelity which is constantly gnawing upon their vitals. With a system of morality which no human laws can equal, and which at first blush silences all objections that possibly can be made to it, it implores the sinner, in the most touching powerful language, to forsake the errors of his ways, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It assures him that there “is peace in believing,” and that God is angry with the wicked every day. “The gospel whispers peace.” It is a friend to the friendless and broken hearted, to the afflicted and distressed every where, opening the door to salvation and immortal felicity. It tells the only way under heaven by which

men can be saved. How important, then, are its developments—how sublime its truths! Those who *doubt* of them are damned already, for they can receive none of its consolations and benefits.

Deist.—I must confess I begin to think that I am wrong in setting up a doubt of a belief in the Bible as an evidence of its want of truth.

Christian.—I am glad of that—you have now given up your mug of cider and one of your main reasons for refusing to be a Christian—will you not now abandon your theory of a plurality of wives?

Deist.—O no; I am satisfied that all men ought to have as many as they please; believing that it would greatly add to the happiness of all parties; which leads me to digress a little from the subject matter of our discourse, and enter upon a new topic, viz. *The Art of Courting*.

Christian.—O do not *now*, sir. I very much dislike to mix things of a serious nature with levity or sport.

Deist.—There is nothing light or trivial, I assure you, in the art of courting. Although it is sometimes a very pleasant business, and the cause of laughter either out of contempt or for joy, I have no belief that it is any other than a very important piece of work, and as I hold to polygamy, you must suffer me to open my mind to you in full.

The art of courting successfully, implies the practice of many virtues; and he that would come off conqueror, while he is known to be a slave of vice, will always labour under almost insuperable disadvantages.

1. Then the art of courting requires one to maintain a good character. The idler, the spendthrift, the drunkard, the debauchee, the ruffian, can never be soul and heart admired by any female of good sense; and to court or marry one without good sense, would be but a sorry business. Destitute of character, both men and women, how-

ever fashionable they may be in dress, or howsoever wealthy they may be, must always meet with a thousand withering scorns—they can never be looked up to as useful valuable partners in the honourable estate of matrimony. No circumstances, however favourable, can make due amends for loss of character. Besides, all who are conscious that their characters are good, or that they deserve to be good, have a confidence about them, which always supplies them with renewed courage and animation; and I need not add, that “a faint heart never wins a fair lady.”

2. Another thing to be attended to in the art of courting, is neatness of dress and of person. It is not necessary to bow obsequiously to all the changeable rules of fashion—but some regard should be paid to them in dress, or one will be subjected to everlasting ridicule. When fashion is in the bounds of reason and common sense, it is most proper, most expedient, to give way to it, because a contempt of it signifies nearly a contempt of the company one is in. And as inattention to dress shows a want of politeness and good manners, so does a want of cleanliness, so often manifested in long dirty beards, foul teeth, &c. What lady would like to have one kiss her whose breath was not as sweet as her own?

3. The next thing that I shall mention in the art of courting is *a good heart*. This is worth every thing.—An honest, sound, upright *heart*, is above all price; it should, therefore, be cultivated and cherished by every possible means. A consciousness of inward rectitude, gives stability to action, and affords a constant serenity and peace of mind, which is not only very beneficial to health, but is an evidence of a good character; for who that deservedly has a bad character, can put his hand upon his *heart* and say, this has always beaten high in the cause of virtue, and has never faltered in her steps? A good *heart* not only makes one fearless, cheerful, respected, and steady, but it shows that, with it, a lover can command what is of far more consequence than the riches of the world, and that is the esteem and regard of the terrestrial angels. For where is the pretty girl, or the

lovely woman, who does not admire a *good hearted man*? Not one. No matter what his misfortunes may have been, they will always flutter around him with tender emotions. They will even kindly look over many of his faults, if they only know for certain that he has a *good honest heart*. There is nothing secret in finding a good heart. Any one can have it who will try always to be good in all things; so that this pearl of inestimable price can be attained by all. But it will require a good deal of reformation, and a good deal of patience and perseverance, in those who have it not, before they can be in full possession of its benefits.

4. Affability of manners, decorum in general, and a strict attention to the fair one, are absolutely necessary to be put into constant practice by that one who is seeking for a wife. Words of tenderness may and probably must be uttered; but no language, no carriage, no conduct, that will give the least pain to the female bosom, or any thing whatever that will shock her sense of propriety, should ever come from him who would understand the true art of courting. Her esteem must be gained, and her heart be won, by mildness, courtesy, manliness, and a determination to please. Her wants, wishes, opinions, views, and dislikes, should all be carefully watched and observed. Her weakness, if such she have, should be unobserved or never mentioned, and all her untoward prejudices be looked over in submissive silence. There will be time enough to argue about a difference in opinions at some future period, when the *modus operandi* may not endanger the result of the amatory siege, when the courtship is over and the prize gained, when marriage has actually been celebrated. But I do not consider it necessary that her vanity should be flattered, or her faults applauded. People of both sexes have always enough of the one, and too many of the other. However, she should then, as ever after, be treated with the utmost tenderness and forbearance. There is a sanctity belonging to her nature, to which all men must bow in a holy glow of adoration. Ah! can any generous, enthusiastic, lover, of the rarest, most polished, splendid beauties of

nature, such as the human form of woman divine presents, not be influenced, deeply influenced, by emotions and transports inexpressible? For her are seas explored and mines dug—for her is the earth uplifted and castles built, and to her, (when clothed in the spotless robes of virtue, and purity, and innocence, enkindling, as she does, celestial fires,) ought the homage of universal admiration to be paid.

5. A life of honesty, integrity, and morality, are, as have been hinted, necessary in the art of courting, in order that one should have, 1, a good character, and 2, a good heart; but another thing one must not be destitute of—he who is wooing a damsel must see something in her that is in his fancy extraordinary—in other words, he must be deeply in love with her. This will be the main spring of the whole business. It is not right for one to court a girl he does not love—it will never promote the happiness of either. It makes a hypocrite of him and a fool of her. But his heart, soul, and all, should be set upon her he addresses—he will thus truly think that he is doing God service in getting as close to her as he can, and then, he ought to

6. Tell her how well he loves her—that she is better than the best of honeycomb, and all that is in the same, be it ever so sweet. He should look at her with fondness, and his lips may now and then give vent to his feelings in the smoothest of kisses. He should breathe nothing but the perfumes of Arabia. As his heart has been stolen by the fair one, it is very proper that he should give her all possible attention. In her good society his time will seem short, and it will undoubtedly be most happy indeed, should she return her kindness for his fire.

7. If she should be coy and distant, he must still hold on—for even if he should take many years to obtain ownership of a valuable jewel, the final result will make ample amends for all time spent and pains taken. His motto should be, “a day, an hour, of virtuous” love, “is worth a whole eternity of” debauchery, or even of single blessedness.

8. He should court and obtain the good graces, as much as possible, of the fair lady's friends. Their influence, if exerted against him, after all of his labours, even when quivers are sticking fast to his heart, will, as likely as not, prove fatal. Wisdom and prudence, therefore, dictate a plain course for him to pursue in regard to them.

9. He should be a tolerationist in religion, and never ridicule it, even if he should think it absurd.

10. He should wage an everlasting war against the practice of scandal, and always endeavour to think that all are as harmless and upright as himself. If he thinks that such and such a lady, or that such and such a gentleman has failings, he had better say nothing about them; for although he may not design to inflict an injury, and his heart may be far from evil, yet much mischief might arise in consequence of what he might say, and many hard thoughts might be engendered from his unintentional folly.

11. When one becomes fairly in love, and has made his addresses for a considerable length of time to the fair object of his chaste desires, it is to be presumed that the heart wooed will be won. In that case, the gentleman should maintain his ground, hold fast to his affections, and make good all his promises expressed and implied.—In other words, he should never desert her, or forsake her for another, without a provocation of causes the most forcible and urgent. If he should, he might become the destroyer of some of the best hopes that ever gladdened the heart of a fond woman—if he should, not only the burnings of cruel jealousy would invade her bosom, but more than possible, the death smitten horrors of despair would pierce her to the heart. And when a swain should find a second sweet-heart turning coquette, he might find, when too late, that the true art of courting demands the practice of a faithful constancy on *his* part, to insure it from *another*. And

12. He ought to consider that the business in which he is engaged is the most interesting and important of any in life, as truth will warrant it to be so universally. He, by so doing, will be under the greater inducement to

act well his part in it, as becomes a rational creature, about to form a relation for life, of a character which must most sensibly insure his choicest happiness, or bring about his most poignant distress. *Just reflections*, therefore, will, when made constant companions of, be doubtless the means of keeping him in his line of duty, and of the consummation of his ardent well-deserved hopes.

Christian.—Your tongue is eloquent. But here you ought to stop. Here you should “stay” your “proud waves” of fancy, fact, and reason, and say, “thus far shalt thou go and no farther.” No Christian can object to any of your rules concerning courtship, provided they are only to apply to one wife at a time. But any thing beyond this seems abominable and horrible. What! talk about having two or more wives at once in a country of good laws, republican principles, civilization, and Christianity!

Deist.—There are many things in this world, that, at first view, appear to be “abominable and horrible,” that, upon investigation and impartial examination, turn out to be sound wholesome truths, or rights, natural, rational, social, beneficial, and salutary. The admirers of Papal supremacy, and the friends and professors of the Roman Catholic religion, believe the doctrines of what they call heretics, to be “abominable and horrible;” and these heretics, yourself, no doubt, among the number, constitute by far the largest body of Christians, viz. all who are not Catholics. In England, France, Spain, and European countries in general, democracy and republicanism are nearly universally considered to be “horrible and abominable;” while in the United States we consider such governments as are hereditary and despotic, to be “horrible and abominable.” Polygamy may be “horrible and abominable,” or not, according to circumstances; and so may a single life, or a married state limited to one wife, be both “horrible and abominable,” according to the peculiar circumstances which may attend each of those conditions. In many countries of the eastern

hemisphere, men are allowed to have as many wives as they please, and they do not think it "horrible and abominable." In ancient Jewish times, men had as many wives as they wanted, and all was right, even in the sight of God; then why should it not be so now? It is not necessary for me to enlarge upon the proposition that marriage is an appendage merely of civil society—I trust that I have said enough in another place about it, to reduce it to an undeniable fact. The design and intention of human law, in all its enactments concerning marriage, is, 1, to advance generally the happiness of the parties, and 2, to see that their offspring have maintenance, training, and education. Polygamy, even in the United States, and in all parts of the world, under suitable regulations, would, in my opinion, clearly add to the general stock of happiness, while it would furnish just as good means for the maintenance, &c., of children, as single marriages. The situation of an old bachelor or an old maid, I do consider to be far more "abominable and horrible" than that of two pretty wives, happy and contented with their children, and with the noble husband and father, all blessed with a thousand comforts and joys. Their property must all be one and the same, a common stock—their mutual interests must all be one and the same, and the joint productions of their labour and industry will inure to the benefit of all. The situation of that man, I should rather say, is "horrible and abominable," who can never have but one wife. No matter how diseased she may be, no matter how wicked and unreasonable her temper may be, no matter how lazy she may be, no matter how sluttish she may be, no matter how ignorant she may be, he, by the law of the land, as it now stands, can never in her life time have another.

One objection, no doubt, that will be urged against polygamy, is, that the greater natural increase would present too much of an impediment in the way of their comfortable support by one man. But it ought to be considered, that many fortunes might be gathered together by the man, in virtue of his marriage contracts, which obviates the objection at once. Many a lady of a splendid

fortune never marries, because she sees none about her unmarried that she would have; and no wonder, for all good men of spirit, who have a tithe of the music in their souls, that is common, get married early, and old bachelors therefore are generally cold hearted, cowardly, distant, and cross grained; but she, nevertheless, would have many a married man who she perceives manages well, is a good provider, and is kind, affectionate, and indulgent, did the law in its wisdom only allow of it. As for the women, if they married without fortunes of their own, they would do no more when married than single, towards supporting themselves—whether married or single, they would have to work and labour. And if it should cost something to rear very young children, they (the mothers) will, when married, probably be contented with a great deal less expense in the article of dress, (which among single females is usually very great) than they would if watching, sighing, and waiting for beaux all their life time. And as for education, so cheap has that become in America, that were our children three times as numerous, there would be no difficulty about that. In fact, a gentleman of a large family and several wives, might depute one of them to be his domestic instructor—or while some might teach music, drawing, embroidery, and needle-work, others might jointly teach the same pupils to bake, wash, mend, spin, weave, and do an infinite variety of other useful labour for the common benefit of all, and their mutual improvement, support, and happiness.

Another objection that might be urged against my plan, is the equilibrium in the numbers of the two sexes. But when it is called to mind, that war and seafaring frequently make females far more numerous than males, it falls in a great measure to the ground. Besides, a majority, I doubt not, would, were the law altered to my mind, still prefer single marriages. But I would leave marriage free—would not clog it with any unnatural, unreasonable obstructions, but leave all, as much as possible, in a state of nature, especially when it could never infringe on the rights of others, and when, too, as no

doubt it does, the present law hinders many a man from enjoying that rational happiness which the God of nature has fitted him both to enjoy and impart to others.—But I would still grant divorces for all the causes now enumerated by the law.

Again; should it be said that there would be a hardship, in case of the death of the husband, for dowers to go alike to the several widows, when some of them brought large fortunes to the common estate, and others nothing—I would reply, that a bargain, attended with such consequences, could never, at any stage of its progress, be, on the part of any of the women, compulsory, and they might as well dispose of their property “for better or for worse,” so that it might go into the general fund, as not, if they should see fit; or the law might make provision, as it does in single marriages now, that the real estate of a wife could never upon her death go to any but the heirs of her body, or to such near friends and blood relations as would be most proper.

Once more; if it should be objected that jarring and altercation would be apt to prevail among the several wives; I should say, that whether they were quarrelsome and jealous, would depend partly upon the manner in which their husbands would treat them, partly on their natural dispositions, and partly on the manner in which they were brought up. Misconduct and want of amiableness, would certainly not be peculiar to polygamy, for they may be seen in single marriages almost every where. Weakness and imperfection, or some failing or other, seem more or less to belong to all, be they married or single; and no situation can make either husband or wife perfect in this life. Even in celibacy, we find jealousy as cruel as the grave, and quarrels to be by no means uncommon.

Marriage, however, is decidedly the best adapted to the welfare of the world at large—it should, therefore, be by law so regulated as to administer to all the greatest sum of happiness, which will never be done by a limited parsimonious distribution of its benefits, such as must be inseparable from single marriages. It should be as free as

the air of heaven, and healthfulness, and quiet, and satisfaction, will be the pleasing results.

Rights, in a state of civil society, are either *natural* or *acquired*; and any law which infringes upon the *former*, without adding to or making more secure the *latter*, is not only useless, but cruel, tyrannical, and unjust.—In a state of nature, all have a free right to marry; in a community like ours, with a government which protects us in the enjoyment of those acquired rights peculiar to its organization, or to an organization of a similar character, all have not such a right. The privilege is partial, limited, and contracted—it is no wonder, then, that prostitution, and all its grovelling filthiness, and low minded infamy, should prevail as it does most extensively—it is no wonder, therefore, that such a state of marriage, should oftentimes, in effect, lock one up as a prisoner in a loathsome jail for life, not because one has committed any crime, but because he was unfortunate in the selection of a companion, without any possibility of having the evil mitigated by a new marriage in the lifetime of such companion, except for certain causes, which, although they give ground for a divorce, yet are not frequently in reality half so destructive of happiness as many others, which, from the nature of them, the present law can take no notice of, such as peevishness, stubbornness, extravagance, revenge, slander, &c. Polygamy might not remove all these, but it opens the door for a wretched abused husband to seek new domestic society, more congenial to his happiness, and gives opportunity in part to ward off evils that most sorrowfully oppress the soul.

Christian.—Your remedy in such a case would be worse than the disease. Your fond dreams of happiness, with a parcel of jealous quarrelsome wives, could never be realized. “Divided love can never be happy.” An unity of interests and feelings, necessary in a state of marriage, could therefore not belong to a plurality of wives, even were there in a community many more females than males, which is not the fact. Your visionary project is the offspring of that want of belief in the

true religion, whose chief concern is to provide for the eternal welfare of the soul. Do not suppose that this world is the place of happiness—it is not—it is only a state of trial and probation. It is solely designed to be preparatory to that great day of judgment which will fix the *eternal doom* of the countless millions of the human race. One wife is enough for one man who is determined not to be enervated with criminal pleasure, and who thinks more of his God and his soul than of the deceptive vanities of time and sense. O, my friend, can nothing be done to convince you, unless you meet with a saving change of heart, that you are an undone, lost, and ruined creature, forever?

Deist.—But wherefore “lost and ruined?” because I do not believe what, according to the evidence now before me, I cannot believe? because I do not believe in the superstitious nonsense of fable and fiction? As for faith and repentance, for reasons I have already in part mentioned, they no more concern one’s condition after death, than did the Dutchman’s belief that his axe would swim, on being told that it would, for it sunk to the bottom immediately. What must be the situation of one after death, will depend not on faith or wishes, but on the will and pleasure of God, which, from the closest investigation of the nature of the *soul*, we here can know nothing about. What it is apart from the *body*, we cannot tell. Anatomical knowledge throws no light upon the subject, nor do the most refined metaphysical speculations. No analyses of any things in nature can dispel the veil of darkness which attends the examination. The Old Testament says nothing about it, except in one or two detached lines, and they give no satisfaction. The New Testament merely mentions about a world to come, and that Christ has “brought immortality to light in the gospel;” but these loose expressions signify nothing. What sort of a world to come was meant, is not easy to tell.—A world to come, might imply a continued, an improved, or a worse condition than the present condition here. It is susceptible of many significations, and therefore is

nothing to the point. So too of immortality—we are not sure but that the term might concern the things of this life alone—it is frequently used in that sense. The Bible, therefore, even if it was in truth Divine Revelation, does not settle the question for certain, about the immortality of the soul; so that Christians can do no more than Deists, viz. *simply hope* that it will be everlasting, and capable of enjoying happiness to an infinity of duration. This at once puts natural religion upon as elevated ground, at the least, as any other religion, though its votaries may insult Deists, that is, believers in God, as being heretics and infidels. The truth is, one cannot be under a delusion as regards a different state of existence from this, “whose life is in the right,” who harms no one, and who gives every one his due. I therefore hold to *deeds* more than to *creeds*. Let honesty and virtue be uppermost, and all will be safe. Next,

8. Another reason why I do not believe in the Bible is, because, although miracles are said and related to have been wrought, there is no proof of it but hearsay and vague tradition, or the Book itself, expounded by men insisting upon their truth, who are under violent temptations to maintain them to be such, their salaries and means of living depending on the existence of the belief they inculcate. Their testimony is not sufficiently disinterested—hence it should be received with caution, and not by any means be deemed conclusive. Lastly,

9. Another reason I will give in defence of my principles, is the impossibility, inconsistency, and downright nonsense of the doctrine of the trinity, and of a dying, but perfect, infinite, and eternal God! What! am I to be told in the same breath, that one is three and three one? It may as well be said that green cloth is blue cloth, or that a black horse is a white horse. Again; the world is called upon to swallow the laughable hoax that a perfect Being, the very fountain, preserver, and essence of life, *can die!* and what is more, that he *can come to life again!* being (not half horse and half alligator, &c., as the Kentuckian said, but) *half* devilish sinful man, and *half* holy immaculate God—a mixture of the finite with

the infinite, the pure with the impure, and all for what? to save man from hell. What connexion a dying God has with man's fitness for heaven or hell, we cannot discover. The one has no natural, probable, or reasonable relationship to the other—the means have no more application to the end, than the invention of any other story, such as would answer the purposes of imposture and credulity. But I have said enough.

Christian.—So I should think, unless it could be better said. Sorry am I, that to the sin of disbelief, you should add that of blasphemy. But I yet indulge the hope, that you will soon be convinced of your errors; for I am persuaded that your native candour and magnanimity of heart, will not permit you long to indulge in wilful obstinacy, when your reason and understanding have been sufficiently enlightened.

On the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as regards the certainty and plainness of its statement in the Bible, I take issue with you. I maintain that it is clearly set forth, and this is the very chief reason why I receive the whole Book as the Word of the ever living God. This is enough for me. But you object to its divinity, because some of its expounders and doctors and preachers have stipends for their time and services! O for shame—away with your niggardly peevishness—such clamour is unworthy of any one who has any pretensions to consistency or reason. Suppose you should say that such and such an almanack maker is not entitled to any credence, in his calculations of the eclipses of the sun, because, forsooth, the publisher was to pay him for his services, would a single man, woman, or child, pay any heed to you? No—nor ought they to a similar objection I have just mentioned, brought forward by you against the Bible. Lastly, you cannot comprehend the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But what of that in making you an unbeliever? Why should that present such a weighty objection to your reception of the truth? Can you comprehend how God could make all things out of nothing? No; or how

He is self existent and eternal? No; or how by his single fiat thousands and millions of worlds and suns and solar systems perform their amazing and distant revolutions with such exactness and certainty? No. But you will not and cannot pretend to deny any of them; why, then, should you object to the truth of the three persons in one Godhead, merely because it is not perfectly within your comprehension? Or why deride the death of our Saviour for the salvation of men, merely because you suppose that God, perhaps, might have made use of different means to accomplish the same grand purpose? I think that your mind has become corrupted by the wild wishes you have expressed for a law in favour of polygamy, and that the foolish pleasures of this dying and sinful world, have brought you into a deplorable state of madness, from which I pray a merciful God speedily to deliver you.

You have very properly observed, that a Deist can only *hope* for happiness after death. But a Christian does not only *hope* for, but actually *believes* in, existence hereafter. He has an *assurance* of it—and, if he has repented of his sins, and has faith in Christ, he has an “anchor of the soul sure and steadfast.”—Herein may be seen the great superiority of the Christian religion over all scepticism and unbelief, from whence we may deduce an argument of no trifling magnitude in favour of the glorious truth of gospel salvation. Faith takes us from the earth and “fastens us to the skies.” It is our great support in life, and our reliance in the hour of death. It “builds a bridge” over the dark gulf between time and eternity, and lands us safely at the footstool of the throne of the great “I AM.” It saves us from the awful burnings of an endless hell, and assures us that we may enjoy the rapturous pleasures of Heaven forever. O! how welcome is the thought to the soul, that after death, (which at the longest will *soon* reach all of us here on earth) all pain and wo, sickness, sin, persecution, and poverty, all imperfection, misunderstanding, cruelty, disappointment, satiety, and remorse, will be no more! that we shall be in the presence of God forever, where the

pure streams of the waters of life flow in copious profusion, where the bread of eternal existence will put us upon a level with the perfections of angels and seraphs, and where love reigns in the fulness of unalloyed blisses, among the groves of a new and a celestial paradise, kept alive with songs of redemption, amid the sweetest kisses and the most fragrant perfumes—such blisses, groves, songs, kisses, and perfumes, as we can never dream of, or form any just imagination about upon earth ; such, in short, as are peculiar to Heaven ! It is the Christian, and the Christian alone, that is to be made partaker of all these !

Immortality ! O my heart leaps for joy at the splendours of its glory ! O how transporting is the contemplation that we may shortly live in “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens !” the abode of such an infinitude of perfections ! “Immortal !” Were but *one* immortal, how

“Would *others* envy, how would *thrones* adore !

“Because ’tis *common*, is the blessing lost ?”

Could the dreams or the fondest expectations of the poet and lover be realized, could ambition with all its gorgeous displays of pomp and renown, could wealth with all its golden treasures, each have all that mortal man could desire here, they will all amount to nothing compared to the ever blessed joys of an eternal heaven ! such a heaven as is described in the Scriptures of truth, and is promised to all those who do the will of the Lord ! *Good works* are the natural and invariable attendants or effects of *Faith* and *Repentance*, and *all* do and must make those who are subject to *them*, virtuous and good, useful in life both to themselves and to others. What benevolent heart, therefore, could rationally decry or deride the religion of Christ ? It teaches humility, temperance, patience, resignation, forgiveness of injuries, peace, humanity, chastity, sobriety, honesty, and all the train of virtues which add to and are essential in the formation of our choicest happiness, while it points the

way to the grand after scene that is immortal. But can the Deist or an Heathen say, with truth, that he has a religion which satisfactorily points out, discovers, or enforces these? Surely not. The religion of Jesus Christ, therefore, must be from Heaven.

The Christian can court death with the fondest smiles. He looks forward to a "new heaven and a new earth," where sin and sorrow can no more approach. He views the grave as the vestibule, as the dawning of existence, and therefore welcomes an entrance there. He knows that "his Redeemer liveth," and makes constant preparation to be ready for a reception by him into the mansions of bliss. Prayer and praise, alternately occupy his whole time. He does all for the glory of God. He fights the good fight of faith manfully, and is never tired of well doing. He "loves God supremely, and his neighbour as himself." Benevolence warms his heart and wins friends even from those who are "not of the household of faith." He extends his arms in acts of charity, not to be seen of men, but because he delights in doing good. He is never ashamed of Jesus, for as humble as was his birth, and despised as was his death, he knows that He was "the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world." His gratitude overflows for his infinite mercy and the blood of his redemption. There is a fire and an animation belonging to his new born soul, which the unbeliever, until he meets with a saving change, can never realize. He not only qualifies himself for heaven, but exerts himself to the utmost to have all go there he possibly can. He pardons and prays for his enemies, after the manner of his Master, and his whole life sheds a radiance upon all around him. He has a Friend and a Support that the world knows not of—wealth that it does not possess, and love that it cannot give. His aim is to be perfect "even as his Father who is in Heaven is perfect." Who therefore would not be a believer in and a follower of Christ?

FINIS.

